

VZCZCXR06972
PP RUEHPA RUEHROV
DE RUEHFR #2067/01 0891313
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 301313Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5785
INFO RUCNFUR/DARFUR COLLECTIVE
RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHGG/UN SECURITY COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 PARIS 002067

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/30/2016

TAGS: PREL MARR SU CD IV BN LI NI FR

SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENTIAL ADVISOR BONNECORSE: SUDAN, CHAD, COTE D'IVOIRE, BENIN, CHARLES TAYLOR

Classified By: AMBASSADOR CRAIG STAPLETON, FOR REASONS 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Deputy Secretary Zoellick on March 10 discussed Sudan, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Benin, and the possible transfer of Charles Taylor from Nigeria to the Netherlands via Sierra Leone, with the French Presidency's Africa advisor, Michel de Bonnecorse. On Sudan, the two sides expressed general agreement on the need to encourage progress in the Abuja talks, create a UN mission for Sudan, and support AMIS in the interim. Bonnecorse notably did not engage in a NATO-EU theological discussion of the roles of the two organizations. He related French efforts to lobby others to accept a UN operation, noting the possible need to use non-Western peacekeepers, but with Western support for planning and logistics. On Chad, both sides agreed on the need to consult closely in order to support stability and to plan for ways to ensure a peaceful transition to a post-Deby Chad. The two sides agreed on the need to strengthen PM Banny in Cote d'Ivoire. Bonnecorse also suggested increasing the UN presence in Cote d'Ivoire (but did not push this point aggressively); the Deputy Secretary said that a drawdown of UNMEE could provide resources to do so. He suggested P-3 talks on Cote d'Ivoire.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY CONT'D: Bonnecorse expressed concern about the possibility that those in President Kerekou's circle might try to derail the ongoing election process in Benin and thereby allow Kerekou to remain in power. The Deputy Secretary noted the leverage the U.S. enjoys through the

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Millennium Challenge Account with Benin and that we would use it if necessary. Bonnecorse noted an agreement between Liberian President Johnson-Sirleaf and Nigerian President Obasanjo for Charles Taylor to be transferred to the Hague, via Sierra Leone, for prosecution. Bonnecorse urged rapid UNSC approval of this plan and the need to prohibit Taylor from spending too much time in Sierra Leone because of the possibility his supporters might try to free him. The Deputy Secretary agreed on the need for quick action. END SUMMARY.

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¶3. (C) Deputy Secretary Robert Zoellick met on March 10 for over an hour with Michel de Bonnecorse, Africa advisor to President Chirac. MFA A/S-equivalent Bruno Joubert, a notetaker, and an interpreter attended on the French side; Ambassador Stapleton, Khartoum Charge Hume, AF DAS Ranneberger, D Chief of Staff Padilla, D Special Assistant Smith, and an Embassy notetaker accompanied the Deputy Secretary.

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SUDAN: U.S. ASSESSMENT

¶4. (C) The Deputy Secretary reviewed his talks on Sudan in Brussels earlier in the week. The EU's Solana succeeded well in framing the issues, which centered on: (1) recognition that all parties needed to advance the Abuja peace talks; (2) recognition of the need to strengthen AMIS (although modalities for doing so were not clear); and (2) moving forward with creating a UN operation, which the AU was to discuss on March 10. The Deputy Secretary said that, concerning Abuja, he would have a better sense of developments following his meeting later in the day with AU Special Envoy Salim Salim.

¶5. (C) The Deputy Secretary reported that the Government of National Unity (GNU) appeared to be drawing closer to a common position, a useful step. This would include the National Congress Party and the SPLM, with First Vice-President Salva Kiir also involved. The main issues were: (1) power sharing, (2) the distribution of wealth, and (3) security. There appeared to be elements on the first two issues in play but the security issue was more complicated, with several challenges in terms of sequencing and operational effectiveness. A certain amount of pressure, and a way to channel such pressure to make it productive, might be necessary to effect progress. Salim seemed to express some weariness with the process. He had mentioned a possible "enhanced cease-fire," which, the Deputy Secretary said, the U.S. supported, but an enhanced cease-fire might not be more effective than the cease-fire that is ostensibly already in place, which is not widely respected. However, if this could form the basis of further security discussions, the U.S. could offer its encouragement. The Deputy Secretary noted his earlier meeting on March 20 with EU Special Representative for Sudan Pekka Haavisto, who also mentioned Salim's interest in going forward in this manner.

¶6. (C) The Deputy Secretary commented that progress in Abuja would help in many respects. He noted, however, that divisions on the rebel side persisted, and that it was

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difficult to reach an agreement when one side continued to be divided. It would be important, if Salim finds a reasonable solution and is able to bring the GNU along, to press the rebel side. However, one could not be confident the rebels would be in a position to negotiate. Progress by Salim would increase the need for rebel leaders to go to Abuja. The rebels and government were both part of the process. Another factor to consider were the tribes/clans in Darfur. Progress on security would have to complement reconciliation in Darfur. If not, the process could be manipulated by the Sudanese government.

¶7. (C) On AMIS, the Deputy Secretary envisioned support from NATO and the EU. He had discussed the issue with NATO Secretary-General de Hoop Scheffer. The most likely option

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seemed to be robust planning support. Recent assessments of AMIS showed a shortage of personnel, limited access to intelligence, and logistical and operational planning shortfalls. The Deputy Secretary said the U.S. was looking for contributions from NATO and the EU and was not "theological" on how that could be obtained. However, we would need an AU or UN. Without support from NATO and the EU, it was difficult to see how AMIS could be strengthened -- who would provide forces? Who would provide additional funding?

¶8. (C) On the UN issue, the Deputy Secretary noted Sudan's continued opposition to a UN mission. Solana in Brussels had prodded Sudan Second Vice-President Taha, commenting that in BBC news footage, many of those protesting UN involvement resembled soldiers and not students. Solana effectively made the point that attacking the UN was not sensible and that "we

are all members." At the Sudan Consortium Conference the previous day, the Deputy Secretary noted his expression of outrage to Taha and Salva Kiir that some were calling for the deaths of UN Special Representative Pronk and U.S. Charge Hume. We needed to push harder in explaining that this was completely unacceptable, he emphasized. AU Commission Chairman Konare seemed willing to be supportive regarding a UN operation, as were other AU PSC members, but this had to be balanced against Khartoum's pressure to avoid a UN mission. The Deputy Secretary had received mixed reports on what the AU might decide on March 10. One option, the Deputy Secretary continued, would be to emphasize the shared goal of

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achieving successful results at Abuja and to link UN participation to Abuja. The Deputy Secretary noted that as he was leaving Brussels, Taha seemed to indicate that he was not against the UN, and had even said this to the press, but that some in Khartoum were taking a harder line.

¶9. (C) On the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the Deputy Secretary said that it was appropriate to acknowledge progress, but the CPA was a complicated document. We needed to exert pressure to build momentum. There was also a need to develop financial controls, to ensure that we know how funds we provide are used. Within the CPA context, we needed to push on security issues as well, to encourage North-South progress, which could have a positive effect on Darfur.

¶10. (C) The Deputy Secretary noted his first meeting with Salva Kiir and the huge challenges he faced. He has proved to be an intelligent individual coping well with the pressures he faces on many sides -- from Khartoum, the South (including Mrs. Garang, Bonnecorse interjected). All things considered, the Deputy Secretary said that Salva Kiir had done relatively well. We needed to support and strengthen him. It was easy to criticize him, but that would only weaken him. The Deputy Secretary believed that Salva Kiir was capable of a larger role, and noted his efforts to help with the Darfur problem. Salva Kiir should also be associated with any progress on the Abuja talks as well.

SUDAN: BONNECORSE

¶11. (C) Bonnecorse thanked the Deputy Secretary for his analysis. He said the Brussels meetings had been useful and that there had been a good climate at the Consortium Conference on March 9. Concerning the AU PSC and UN issue, Bonnecorse said that he did not believe the PSC would decide on an outright "no." However, the PSC might instead express an "OK, but . . ." Bonnecorse said that there should be a strong link between progress at Abuja and the move to a UN mission, and, at the same time, strong continued support for AMIS. He said there were problems involving timing and the pressure the international community could bring to bear. Progress might be achieved in Abuja within three or four months, with pressure from the international community on African states, Khartoum, and on the Sudanese rebels. He

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said it was nearing time to "put a gun to their heads" to reach agreement in Abuja. Bonnecorse also suggested the need for a cease-fire agreement enforced by AMIS and a framework agreement on power sharing and the distribution of wealth. This framework agreement was something that could perhaps be considered or implemented once the UN mission is operating.

¶12. (C) Bonnecorse said that the GOF had discussed Sudan and the UN issue with a number of countries. He noted President Chirac's discussion with Egyptian President Mubarak. Chirac called a number of African heads of state after speaking with President Bush. The "reasonable" leaders understood the need to go to the UN. However, one message the French had received was that the UN mission should not be composed primarily of peacekeepers from Western countries. He added that concerning operational planning and logistical

support, there was likely to be no objection to Western leadership. He advised that respecting these factors could make it easier to obtain support for a UN mission.

¶13. (C) Bonnecorse said the EU and France did not have extensive influence over the rebels and encouraged the U.S. to use its leverage. Mentioning Salim's negotiations, Bonnecorse said that the rebels should be brought together and encouraged to develop a common political outlook, which he said they now lacked. He repeated that France continued to lobby its African contacts, which included those at the AU, such as Commission Chairman Konare.

¶14. (C) The Deputy Secretary said he agreed with Bonnecorse's analysis, but said that U.S. ties with the rebels were also limited. He said the U.S. would try to influence them. He suggested that the EU and U.S. both attempt to do so together. The rebels had started their rebellion with no political agenda. Salim's process could identify an outcome that we should persuade the rebels to accept.

¶15. (C) The Deputy Secretary expressed concern that the situation in Darfur would deteriorate. Violence could escalate at any point such that NGOs and the UN would have to leave. Calamity would ensue, with over a million people unfed and left to fend for themselves. He repeated the need to push for progress at Abuja, strengthen AMIS, and establish the UN mission. The UN process could take time, and delays could complicate existing problems. The Deputy Secretary said that President Bush raised UN peacekeeping during his recent visits to India and Pakistan and that we would do so with the Egyptian Defense Minister during his Washington visit.

¶16. (C) MFA A/S-equivalent for Africa Joubert said that, regarding a UN mission in Sudan, we needed to study carefully what its role and mandate would be. He noted Sudan's concerns about such a mission being "too heavy." The Deputy Secretary said that he and Solana discussed this with Taha in

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Brussels. The Deputy Secretary emphasized that having a UN presence was in Sudan's interest. Khartoum would be better off with the UN present, if only to deflect some of the blame for the Darfur situation. Khartoum would no longer be held completely responsible. The UN mission's mandate could depend on the Abuja talks. It would be important to create an environment where refugees and displaced persons were confident they could return home safely, without the risk of being attacked by the Janjaweed or other groups. The UN mission presented several worries for Khartoum, including loss of sovereignty, which would be complicated if there is no progress in Abuja. The Deputy Secretary again noted that one challenge was to make Khartoum understand that the UN option was in its own interest.

¶17. (C) Turning to Joubert's point on the UN mission's mandate, The Deputy Secretary said the mission would require a robust one. A lightly armed force would face the same difficulties as AMIS in dealing with relatively well-armed hostile forces. He stressed the needed for an environment conducive to a return home by those displaced. We would have to keep discussing with the Sudanese. Successful talks in Abuja would make this easier.

CHAD

¶18. (C) During the discussion of Sudan, the Deputy Secretary asked about Libya's interests. Bonnecorse said

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Libya was now engaging France in regional issues such as Sudan, whereas for 30 years it wanted to have nothing to do with France in the region, and he offered French assistance engaging the Libyans. The Deputy Secretary and Bonnecorse

then focused on Chad. Regarding the recent meeting in Tripoli, Bonnecorse said that one negative point was that trust between Chad and Sudan had not been re-established in Tripoli. One positive development was that support by one side for the other side's rebels had diminished somewhat. He said that France "knew" that Chad was helping Sudanese rebels in Darfur politically and militarily, and that rebels in Chad opposed to Deby were being helped by Sudan. He did not know the extent to which Sudanese help was attributable to Bashir himself or came from local factions. He said there were some 7,000 armed Chadians, supplied by Sudan, in the border areas and that their objective was to march on Ndjamena. Bonnecorse said that in addition to his fears of being overthrown, Deby and many others in Chad were concerned about the "ethnic cleansing" taking place in Darfur and the possibility that it could spread to Chad.

¶19. (C) The Deputy Secretary noted recent discussions between the French and U.S. ambassadors in Ndjamena on the succession issue and contingencies. He said the U.S. welcomed these exchanges and would like the U.S. and France to continue consulting on these matters. The U.S. shared France's concern over developments in Chad. We would prefer that Deby not be destabilized, but at the same time, were worried about his strength and ability to continue. Deby seemed to be moving forward to the May elections, but had not instituted UNDP reforms. If he went forward with elections, would there be a risk of instability? Would these elections be accepted? Even if elections were successfully held and he retained power, how much longer would he last? Could an election victory followed a year later by stepping down from power lead to a peaceful transition? These were some of the things that we needed consider but for which there were no easy answers, the Deputy Secretary said.

¶20. (C) Bonnecorse agreed that discussions between the two ambassadors in Chad were useful and thought they should continue. He said it would be difficult for France to support the notion of Chad's not going forward with elections, as some have suggested. Bonnecorse thought Deby would implement some of the UNDP's suggested reforms and do something for the opposition before the elections. Bonnecorse noted that everyone assumed it would be "easy" for Deby to win, but France had always said that if the opposition united behind one candidate, it would have a chance of winning. The opposition, however, refused to do so. They will run five or six candidates, thus making it easy for Deby to win. Bonnecorse predicted Deby would make some political gesture at opening up, but it was difficult to say whether the opposition would be receptive to such a gesture. When asked about Deby's health, Bonnecorse said he had recently received treatment at the American Hospital in Paris. He "looks better," Bonnecorse remarked.

¶21. (C) The Deputy Secretary asked whether holding elections and making overtures to the opposition risked encouraging instability. Joubert believed that given current conditions, the risk for turmoil was not high. On the other hand, Joubert said Deby also feared being overthrown by members of his own clan. This would create a void. Deby has made clear that he has always defended the rights of his Zaghawa ethnic group. The Deputy Secretary commented that elections could help identify a successor to Deby. But he acknowledged that there was no identifiable successor at present. Joubert agreed, saying that France had been advising Deby to broaden his appeal and create a more multi-ethnic base of support. Bonnecorse agreed on the difficulty of identifying a successor to Deby. He lamented that Chad in many ways was not really a state but rather a collection of warlords. Despite this, for the past 15 years, Chad has been relatively stable, the first such period it has had since independence. All agreed that another 15 years of stability would be most welcome.

¶22. (C) Bonnecorse referred to a ministerial meeting on March 8 in Tripoli, a follow-up to the previous meeting

involving the same countries. Foreign Ministers from Chad and Sudan were present. He understood that there was an agreement to develop concrete measures on joint border patrols. France had indicated that it could help with air monitoring, if the parties requested French assistance.

¶23. (C) Discussion returned to Libya and its motives and objectives regarding Sudan and Chad. Bonnecorse noted the complex relations between the three countries, as well as previous attempts to create multilateral arrangements in the region that had not succeeded (e.g., Sudan/Chad/CAR border patrolling). Bonnecorse referred to Qadhafi's megalomania

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and desire to be the first president of the "United States of Africa."

¶24. (C) The Deputy Secretary and Bonnecorse agreed on the need for continued consultations on Chad and the succession issue.

COTE D'IVOIRE

¶25. (C) Bonnecorse thanked the U.S. for its attention to Cote d'Ivoire and its willingness to have senior-level participation in the International Working Group (IWG). This was an important signal to illustrate the seriousness of U.S. engagement. On the current situation, Bonnecorse said that more and more African leaders were telling the French there would be no solution as long as the incumbent (e.g., Gbagbo) stayed in power. Bonnecorse said France also preferred a stronger international presence in Cote d'Ivoire, including a stronger UNOCI, mentioning 1,500 additional forces. He predicted that elections in Cote d'Ivoire would not take place in October as scheduled.

¶26. (C) The Deputy Secretary said that Banny's appointment as Prime Minister was a positive step (with which Bonnecorse agreed). He reiterated U.S. support for the IWG and indicated that Washington officials would attend some of its meetings, in combination with the U.S. ambassador in Abidjan. He noted the poor security situation in the north and west of Cote d'Ivoire.

¶27. (C) As for strengthening UNOCI, the Deputy Secretary said France seemed to understand the U.S. desire not to risk destabilizing Liberia. However, UNMEE in Ethiopia and Eritrea would perhaps wind down soon, freeing up resources for use in Cote d'Ivoire. He understood that France would like more police forces rather than soldiers in Cote d'Ivoire (which Bonnecorse confirmed). The Deputy Secretary suggested P-3 discussions on how to proceed in Cote d'Ivoire. We should also work to strengthen PM Banny.

¶28. (C) Bonnecorse agreed with the Deputy Secretary's analysis. France supported PM Banny as well -- "the only good news we've had in 3 and 1/2 years." Bonnecorse said that two ways to strengthen him were the IWG process and an enhanced UN presence to counteract the extremists in the Gbagbo camp. Joubert said that any new mandate put in place if UNOCI enlarges should allow for UN forces to exert greater control over Cote d'Ivoire's radio and television broadcasting facility, which the pro-Gbagbo mob always seizes to use for propaganda purpose whenever trouble erupts.
(COMMENT: Bonnecorse's suggestion that UNOCI be enhanced was expressed in very moderate, unaggressive terms. END COMMENT.)

BENIN

¶29. (C) Bonnecorse then raised concerns about democracy in Benin. He noted that the first round of elections had taken place on March 5, with the second round scheduled for April. President Kerekou had not changed the 1990 constitution and by its terms was not able to seek re-election. However, Bonnecorse said that members of Kerekou's entourage wanted him to run again. Bonnecorse understood that they had a plan

to cancel the results of the March 5 election on the basis of some invented subterfuge, and then declare that Kerekou must stay in power until "proper" elections could be held.

¶30. (C) Bonnecorse said that if this "coup" happened, the international community would need to condemn it swiftly and strongly. Two-thirds of Benin's population had stated their desire for a change in leadership, he observed.

¶31. (C) The Deputy Secretary noted the recently concluded Millennium Challenge Account with Benin, which was based partly on democracy and good governance principles. He said the U.S. would use its MCA leverage if necessary in response to problems that might arise in Benin along the lines Bonnecorse mentioned. The two sides agreed to remain in contact on events in Benin.

CHARLES TAYLOR

¶32. (C) Bonnecorse said that France understood that Liberia's President Johnson-Sirleaf had met with Nigerian President Obasanjo within the past few days and had agreed on a plan to transfer Charles Taylor first to Freetown, and then to the Hague, for prosecution. Bonnecorse said the UN Security Council would likely have to approve this course of action.

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¶33. (C) The Deputy Secretary said his knowledge of the situation was similar to Bonnecorse's. Bonnecorse said France had "general" information that a member of the UNSC might not agree to UNSC authorization of Taylor's transfer. He said that the agreement so far was backed only by Johnson-Sirleaf and Obasanjo -- he was not aware that any other African leaders had taken a position. Bonnecorse said he hoped that the UNSC could act quickly on this matter. France very much wanted to avoid having Taylor spend any significant time in Sierra Leone, given the risk that his supporters might try to free him from confinement. D Special Assistant Smith noted that the Dutch seemed opposed to a Chapter VII UNSC resolution on Taylor; Joubert said France was aware of and did not support the Dutch position.

¶34. (C) The Deputy Secretary agreed to study the issue further. He thought problems with China in the UNSC could be avoided, as long as the Chinese were consulted early and the issue was presented in a way consistent with China's interests. China had not been a problem regarding Sudan and the AU/UN issue, he noted.

¶35. (C) The meeting concluded with the Deputy Secretary telling Bonnecorse that he would keep in touch on the issues they had discussed, and would inform him of anything noteworthy from his talks later in the day with Salim concerning Sudan.

¶36. (U) The Deputy Secretary's office has cleared this message.

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Stapleton